CHAPTER 10

The Worlds of Christendom: Contraction, Expansion, and Division
500–1300

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To examine European society after the breakup of the Roman Empire
- To compare the diverse legacies of Rome in Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire
- To explore medieval European expansion
- To present the backwardness of medieval Europe relative to other civilizations, and the steps by which it caught up

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Opening Vignette
   A. Over the past 30 years millions have converted to the Christian faith in East and South Asia.
      1. similar process in non-Muslim regions of Africa
      2. 60 percent of Christians today live in Asia, Africa, and Latin America

B. In 500s and 600s, Christianity also had flourishing communities across large regions of Afro-Eurasia.
   1. but over next 1000 years African and Asian communities largely vanished, declined, or were marginalized
   2. Christianity became a largely European phenomenon

C. By 1300 C.E. Christianity provided common ground for third-wave societies in western Eurasia.
   1. but Christendom was deeply divided: Byzantine Empire and West
   2. Byzantium continued the traditions of the Greco-Roman world until conquered in 1453 C.E.
      a. Eastern Orthodoxy evolved within this third-wave civilization
   3. Roman imperial order disintegrated in the West
   4. Roman Catholic Church of the West established independence from political authorities; Eastern Orthodox Church did not
5. Western Europe emerged, at an increasing pace after 1000, as a dynamic third-wave civilization
6. Western Europe was a hybrid civilization: classical, Germanic, Celtic
D. The story of global Christendom in the era of third-wave civilizations is one of contractions and expansions.
   1. sharp contractions in Asia and Africa
   2. expansion in Western Europe and Russia
   3. Christian Byzantium contracted and ultimately disappeared
   4. Western Europe contracted but later expanded

II. Christian Contraction in Asia and Africa
A. Islam’s spread was a driving force in the contraction of Christianity.
B. Asian Christianity
   1. within a century or so of Muhammad’s death, Christianity almost disappeared from Arabia
   2. Islamic forces seized Jerusalem and its holy sites
   3. in Syria and Persia many Christians converted voluntarily
      a. those that didn’t were granted the right to practice their religion for payment of a special tax
      b. experiences of individual communities varied
   4. Nestorian Christians or the Church of the East survived but shrank in size in Syria, Iraq, and Persia
      a. Nestorians had some success in Tang China, before ultimately withering
      b. brief revival under Mongols
C. African Christianity
   1. coastal North African Christians largely converted to Islam
   2. in Egypt Coptic Church survived
      a. tolerated by Muslim rulers
      b. until the Crusades and Mongol threat when repressed
      c. most rural Coptic Christians convert, survived in urban areas and remote monasteries
   3. Christianity taking shape in fifth and sixth centuries in the kingdoms of Nubia
      a. thrived for a time, but largely disappeared by 1500 C.E.
   4. Ethiopian Christianity an exception
      a. rulers of Axum adopted Christianity in the fourth century
      b. geography protected from surrounding Muslim world
      c. developed distinctive traditions in isolation

III. Byzantine Christendom: Building on the Roman Past
A. The Byzantine Empire has no clear starting point.
   1. continuation of the Roman Empire
   2. some scholars date its beginning to 330 C.E., with founding of Constantinople
   3. western empire collapsed in fifth century; eastern half survived another 1,000 years
   4. eastern empire contained ancient civilizations: Egypt, Greece, Syria, and Anatolia
   5. Byzantine advantages over western empire
      a. wealthier and more urbanized
      b. more defensible capital (Constantinople)
      c. shorter frontier
      d. access to the Black Sea; command of eastern Mediterranean
      e. stronger army, navy, and merchant marine
      f. continuation of late Roman infrastructure
      g. conscious effort to preserve Roman ways
B. The Byzantine State
   1. Arab/Islamic expansion reduced size of Byzantine state
   2. politics centralized around emperor in Constantinople
   3. territory shrank after 1085, as western Europeans and Turks attacked
      a. fell in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks
C. The Byzantine Church and Christian Divergence
1. the Church was closely tied to the state: caesaropapism
   a. Byzantine emperor was head of both the state and the Church
   b. emperor appointed the patriarch, sometimes made doctrinal decisions, called church councils
2. Orthodox Christianity deeply influenced all of Byzantine life
   a. legitimated imperial rule
   b. provided cultural identity
   c. pervasiveness of churches, icons
   d. even common people engaged in theological disputes
3. Eastern Orthodoxy increasingly defined itself in opposition to Latin Christianity
   a. Latin Christianity was centered on the pope, Rome
   b. growing rift between the two parts of Christendom
   c. sense of religious difference reflected East/West political difference
   d. with rise of Islam, Constantinople and Rome remained as sole hubs of Christendom
   e. important East/West cultural differences (language, philosophy, theology, church practice)
   f. schism in 1054, with mutual excommunication
   g. Crusades (from 1095 on) worsened the situation
   h. during Fourth Crusade, Westerners sacked Constantinople (1204) and ruled Byzantium for next 50 years
4. Byzantium was a central player in long-distance Eurasian trade
   a. Byzantine gold coins (bezants) were a major Mediterranean currency for over 500 years
   b. Byzantine crafts (jewelry, textiles, purple dyes, silk) were in high demand

E. The Conversion of Russia
1. most important conversion was that of Prince Vladimir of Kiev
2. Orthodoxy transformed state of Rus; became central to Russian identity
3. top-down conversion meant that many common people still practiced pagan rituals and held traditional beliefs
4. Moscow finally declared itself to be the “third Rome,” assuming role of protector of Christianity after fall of Constantinople

IV. Western Christendom: Rebuilding in the Wake of Roman Collapse
A. Western Europe was on the margins of world history for most of the third-wave millennium.
1. it was far removed from the growing world trade routes
2. European geography made political unity difficult
3. coastlines and river systems facilitated internal exchange
4. moderate climate enabled population growth
B. Political Life in Western Europe
1. traditional date for fall of western Roman Empire is 476 C.E.
2. with Roman collapse:
   a. large-scale centralized rule vanished
   b. Europe’s population fell by 25 percent because of war and disease
   c. contraction of land under cultivation
   d. great diminution of urban life
e. long-distance trade outside of Italy shriveled up
f. great decline in literacy
g. Germanic peoples emerged as the dominant peoples in West
h. shift in center of gravity from Mediterranean to north and west

3. survival of much of classical and Roman heritage
   a. Germanic peoples who established new kingdoms had been substantially Romanized already
   b. high prestige of things Roman
   c. Germanic rulers adopted Roman-style written law

4. several Germanic kingdoms tried to recreate Roman-style unity
   a. Charlemagne (r. 768–814) acted “imperial”
   b. revival of Roman Empire on Christmas Day 800 (coronation of Charlemagne); soon fragmented
   c. another revival of Roman Empire with imperial coronation of Otto I of Saxony (r. 936–973)

C. Society and the Church
1. within these new kingdoms:
   a. highly fragmented, decentralized society
   b. great local variation
   c. landowning warrior elite exercised power
2. social hierarchies
   a. lesser lords and knights became vassals of kings or great lords
   b. serfdom displaced slavery
3. Catholic Church was a major element of stability
   a. hierarchy modeled on that of the Roman Empire
   b. became very rich
   c. conversion of Europe’s non-Christians
   d. most of Europe was Christian (with pagan elements) by 1100
4. Church and ruling class usually reinforced each other

D. Accelerating Change in the West
1. a series of invasions in 700–1000 hindered European development
   a. Germanic tribes and Central Asian Huns had invaded the Roman Empire
   b. Muslims, Magyars, Vikings
   c. largely ended by 1000 as invaders repelled or absorbed into society
2. ecological changes, 1000–1300
   a. warming trend that started after 750
   b. marshes drained and land reclaimed from the seas
   c. forests reduced to 20% of land area (deforestation)
   d. fresh water sources start to see signs of pollution
3. High Middle Ages: time of clear growth and expansion
   a. European population in 1000 was about 35 million; about 80 million in 1340
   b. opening of new land for cultivation
4. growth of long-distance trade, from two major centers
   a. northern Europe
   b. northern Italian towns
   c. great trading fairs (especially in Champagne area of France) enabled exchange between northern and southern merchants
5. European town and city populations rose
   a. Venice by 1400 had around 150,000 people
   b. still smaller than great cities elsewhere in the world
   c. new specializations, organized into guilds
6. growth of territorial states with better-organized governments
   a. kings consolidated their authority in eleventh–thirteenth centuries
b. appearance of professional administrators

c. some areas did not develop territorial kingdoms (Italian city-states, small German principalities)

7. new opportunities for women
   a. a number of urban professions were open to women
   b. widows of great merchants could continue husbands' business
   c. opportunities declined by the fifteenth century
   d. religious life: nuns, Beguines, anchoresses (e.g., Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich)
   e. but opportunities for religious women were also curtailed

8. new ideas about masculinity: from warrior to “provider”

E. Europe Outward Bound: The Crusading Tradition

1. medieval expansion of Christendom after 1000
   a. occurred at the same time that Byzantium declined
   b. clearance of land, especially on eastern fringe of Europe
   c. Scandinavian colonies in Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland
   d. Europe had direct, though limited, contact with East and South Asia by thirteenth–fourteenth centuries

2. Crusade movement began in 1095
   a. wars at God’s command, authorized by the pope, for which participants received an indulgence (release from penalty for confessed sins)
   b. amazingly popular; were religious wars at their core

3. most famous Crusades aimed to regain Jerusalem and holy places
   a. many waves of Crusaders to the Near East
   b. creation of four small Christian states (last fell in 1291)

   c. showed Europe’s growing organizational ability

4. Iberian Peninsula Crusade

5. Baltic Crusade

6. attacks on Byzantine Empire and Russia

7. Crusades had little lasting political or religious impact in the Middle East

8. Crusades had a significant impact on Europe
   a. conquest of Spain, Sicily, Baltic region
   b. Crusaders weakened Byzantium
   c. popes strengthened their position for a time

   d. tens of thousands of Europeans made contact with the Islamic world
   e. Europeans developed taste for luxury goods of the East
   f. Muslim scholarship and Greek learning flowed into Europe
   g. hardened cultural barriers between peoples

V. The West in Comparative Perspective

A. Catching Up

1. the hybrid civilization of Western Europe was less developed than Byzantium, China, India, or the Islamic world
   a. Muslims regarded Europeans as barbarians
   b. Europeans recognized their own backwardness

2. Europeans were happy to exchange with/borrow from more advanced civilizations to the east
   a. European economies reconnected with the Eurasian trading system
   b. Europeans welcomed scientific, philosophical, and mathematical concepts from Arabs, classical Greeks, and India
   c. the most significant borrowing was from China

3. Europe was a developing civilization like others of the era

4. by 1500, Europe had caught up with China and the Islamic world; surpassed them in some areas
5. 500–1300 was a period of great innovation
   a. agriculture
   b. new reliance on nonanimal sources of energy
   c. technological borrowing for warfare, with further development
   d. Europe developed a passion for technology

B. Pluralism in Politics
1. Europe crystallized into a system of competing states
2. political pluralism shaped Western European civilization
   a. led to frequent wars and militarization
   b. stimulated technological development
3. states still were able to communicate economically and intellectually
4. rulers were generally weaker than those to the east
   a. royal-noble-ecclesiastical power struggle allowed urban merchants to win great independence
   b. perhaps paved the way for capitalism
   c. development of representative institutions (parliaments)

C. Reason and Faith
1. distinctive intellectual tension between faith and reason developed
2. intellectual life flourished in the centuries after 1000
   a. creation of universities from earlier cathedral schools
   b. scholars had some intellectual freedom at universities
3. in the universities, some scholars began to emphasize the ability of human reason to understand divine mysteries
   a. also applied reason to law, medicine, and world of nature
   b. development of “natural philosophy” (scientific study of nature)
4. search for classical Greek texts (especially Aristotle)
   a. were found in Byzantium and the Islamic world
   b. twelfth–thirteenth centuries: access to ancient Greek and Arab scholarship
5. deep impact of Aristotle
   a. his writings were the basis of university education
   b. dominated Western European thought between 1200 and 1700
6. no similar development occurred in the Byzantine Empire
   a. focus of education was the humanities
   b. suspicion of classical Greek thought
7. Islamic world had deep interaction with classical Greek thought
   a. massive amount of translation in ninth–tenth centuries
   b. encouraged a flowering of Arab scholarship between 800 and 1200
   c. caused a debate among Muslim thinkers on faith and reason
   d. Islamic world eventually turned against natural philosophy